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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ethics for Intelligence

If he is to honor internationally recognized codes for ethical conduct of research on humans, President Reagan, in his new intelligence executive order, should ensure that intelligence agencies tell prospective subjects when they are sponsors of the experimentation.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, the CIA sponsored experiments conducted by almost 185 non-government scientists, most of whom did not know who was actually providing the funds. The subjects could not be informed of the sponsor.

Former CIA director Stansfield Turner informed Congress that his agency stopped sponsoring at least drug tests in 1964. However, an intelligence agency still can fund another government agency's research, or pay a private institution, without anyone's being required to inform volunteers who is the sponsor.

In 1977, an intelligence official testifying before the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research cited studies of human brain waves as the sort of experimentation an intelligence agency could sponsor "without really revealing the fact that that research is being done for the intelligence community." He said a scan of brain waves could reveal whether a prisoner being questioned knew the answer even if he said nothing.

The national commission later recommended that participants in research governed by federal regulations should be told who is conducting and funding the study.

What would be the effect of a disclosure requirement? While some Americans might decline to volunteer, others might be even more willing to participate if they knew the purpose was to assist the security of the nation.

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